

The Truth About Idolatry

1 Corinthians 10:14-15

1841

The truth about idolatry...the truth about idolatry. Now we know in this section that we're in in 1 Corinthians that the Apostle Paul is dealing with a particular subject. We've been studying 1 Corinthians long enough now, week after week after week, to find our bearings rather easily. Let me just kind of remind you where we are. This book deals with problems that face the Corinthian assembly and that face really all believers. Some of the problems are the ones which Paul himself recognized, others are the ones which the Corinthians themselves recognized and inquired about.

One of the questions the Corinthians asked was in reference to meat offered to idols. Was it right for them to eat meat that had been offered to an idol? And that introduced the whole area of the Christian's liberty in non-moral things. What does the Christian have the right to do in the area where the Bible doesn't speak? What is our liberty allow us to be free to do? What are the limits to the liberty that a believer has? And we've gone into so much detail on that, I'm not going to do it again. And I apologize to those who are here for the first time and only recommend to you that if you want, you can get some tapes on that. But we're going to just pick up kind of with a brief introduction.

We're talking here then in chapter 8 verse 1 through chapter 11 verse 1 of the liberty of a believer. We've been set free in Christ. We're no longer bound by ceremonies or traditions or ritual or forms or routines or holy days or new moons or feasts or sabbaths or whatever...trappings like that...religious trappings. We are now free. We are free to be guided internally by the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Now, there are many things in the Bible that are forbidden. There are many things in the Bible that are encouraged. There are some things that aren't even mentioned. And the decisions that we have to make in life really boil down to what do we do about the things that aren't mentioned...how do we know what is right and what is not...what is a guideline...how does our liberty operate? And the Corinthians have brought this whole question to our attention by asking one question: can we eat meat offered to an idol?

Now in that day, pagans would offer meat to an idol. Some would go to the priests. Some they would take and consume themselves, take back to their home. And some would go out the back door and be sold in a butcher shop by the priests who would make some money on it. So the chances were that if you went to somebody's home, you might be eating a portion of meat that had been offered to an idol and they had taken it home. You might be eating meat that was purchased in a butcher shop that had been offered to an idol. Or you might even buy such meat when you went shopping.

Now, is it all right to eat that meat? The mature Corinthians had decided it was fine to do that because an idol isn't anything anyway, right? An idol is nothing. In addition to that, God doesn't really care about what we eat. And since an idol is nothing and food isn't the issue, go ahead...thought

these Corinthians. But there were some young Christians in the Corinthian assembly, some weaker Christians who were saying, "Man, we've just been saved out of idolatry, that stuff is too fresh in our minds. All of that hated part of it, we just can't touch that kind of thing. And it seems to me to be a defilement to do that," they were saying. And so there was a conflict in the assembly. And they were saying, "Hey, what's right to do?" And we introduced to ourselves a very important point. We may have the liberty to do something technically, but it may be restricted by some other consideration...namely, how it will effect somebody else. It may be all right in terms of morality. It may be all right in terms of biblical ethics. It may be all right in terms of technicality and Scripture to do a certain thing, but how is it going to effect somebody else if I do it if he doesn't understand that it's right? If he hasn't yet matured to comprehend that?

I always remember the illustration of a guy who was saved as a rock musician, who had absolutely nothing but hatred for that whole thing because he saw in it the whole interweaving of drugs and immorality and the whole thing. And consequently, his whole attitude toward that was such that he said to me one time, "A Christian could never listen to any kind of music that even sounds like that, it's all wrong." And I said, "Why do you think it's wrong?" And he said, "Because I have such a hate for it." Well, that's very subjective. But you see where he's coming from, there's no way that he can accept that kind of thing. Maybe you're raised in a very pristine environment and you've never seen what's behind the picture and it doesn't hit you like that. But that's just one sample of a gray area issue. And there are multiples of that in every culture, in every society, in every period in man's history.

Now in terms of the Corinthians, this is the question they're asking. And Paul says they're two answers to your question. Number one, technically you may have the right to do things but you ask yourself this, how will it effect others? Is it going to make my Christian brother stumble who is still weak? Is it going to be offensive to unbelievers? Number two, how's it going to effect me? How is it going to effect others? How is it going to effect me? I may be free to do it but if I start stringing myself out and start doing these things that I'm free to do and indulge myself too far and get over to the edge of where it becomes sin, living on the thin edge might end in a disaster for me. In the Corinthian situation they were saying, "Well, it's all right to eat meat offered to idols. We buy it in the butcher shop, take it home and eat it, big deal. Well, an idol's nothing so if we go over to our friend's house and he serves us meat offered to an idol, it doesn't matter. We'll just go ahead and eat it. In fact, we ought to probably get involved in our society and since our whole society is idolatrous and every facet of our society is connected to one god or another, we have no problem with going to temples and having the festivals that are there and indulging." And what they were really doing was pushing their liberty right out to the limits, right out to the edge. When Paul introduces this in chapter 8, 9 and 10, he says, "On the contrary, rather than running your liberty to the edge, you ought to limit your liberty on two considerations: one, how will it effect others? Two, how will it effect me?"

Paul illustrated number one in chapter 9. He illustrates number two in chapter 10. And we've been seeing that. Chapter 10 and the end of chapter 9, also, discusses how the abuse of liberty can effect me. If I flirt too long on the edge of sin, I might fall in, chapter 10 verse 12, look at it. "Wherefore, let him that thinks he stands take heed...what?...lest he falls." You can think you're all right, you can run your liberty out to the end, but you could be in trouble. And so, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to make sure that they don't do anything that offends somebody else as he did not do in his own ministry and illustrated it in chapter 9. And do not do anything that could have a negative effect on ourselves.

Now look at verse 14 and let's see how he introduces this passage. "Wherefore," and that particular

particle translated "wherefore" is a very intense particle and it's simply to intensify the logical connection between what he has just said about temptation and what he's going to say now. "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry."

Now that's a very clear thing. By going right out to the edge of the allowable, you can fall into the sinful, is what he is saying. By saying my liberty frees me to run out all the way to the very edge, I may fall into the sinful. And the Corinthians who were already convinced that an idol was nothing, and they were right, and that the issue wasn't what you ate, and they were right, were being induced to go to the sacrificial feast in the temple. And apparently they had already begun to do it because if you go back to chapter 5, you find indication in verse 11 that some of the brothers were not only fornicators and covetous but idolaters. Some of them were actually doing this. Some of them were attending pagan festivals and saying, "Hey, I'm free and I don't have to worship, I don't have to be a part of the thing, I'm just going to go and eat the meal and all my friends are there and I want to maintain my business contacts. I don't have to do what they do."

And so, here comes the ringing point, and this is the thesis of everything I'm going to say, this is the point of it all, the point is not how near does my liberty let me go, but how far can I fly away. That's the point. Paul doesn't say get over to the edge of idolatry but make sure you don't fall in, he says what? Flee from it. Go the opposite direction. The liberty that I enjoy as a Christian is not to permit me to run up to the edge, that's only to expose me needlessly to temptation and sin, but to turn around and run the other way. I've always said that Christian liberty is the freedom to do right for the first time in your life, not to run up against wrong.

Now he uses the term "my dearly beloved," an uncommon phrase in the Greek is used here. And it expresses the deep, deep sentiment of his heart, he is concerned about them. This is not just academic, this is very, very emotional. He says flee, and that's habitual, present imperative. Continually be fleeing from idolatry. You've got it all in your society, turn your back and get out of there. Run from it.

Now notice verse 15. "I speak as to intelligent," phronimosin the Greek, should be translated "intelligent men." You judge what I say. In other words, the thing that I'm saying here is not an obscure argument. This is not something that you're going to have to be a genius to figure out, you're intelligent enough, you figure this out, use your own mind and you must come to the conclusion that the force and logic of what I say is true. You men are capable of seeing clear argument, you're able to judge, so judge. I'm telling you to run from idolatry. Now you think it through and you'll do the same thing. You'll obey what I say.

Now I want you to look at the term "idolatry." That is a very important term and this morning I'm just going to spend some time on this term...just discussing the concept of idolatry. The very term to me is repulsive. It doesn't take me very long to even turn my stomach a little bit when I begin to think about the term, let alone talk about it. It's a repulsive term. It fits somewhere in the category of my vocabulary with words like blasphemy, damned, hell and Judas. It's one of those kind of words. One of those kind of words that I'm not too particularly excited about. It conjures up great anxiety in my heart concerning myself with the holiness and the purity and the character of God.

Now let me say something that I think is very basic. This, I believe, and by this I mean idolatry, is the most serious and contaminating sin there is. Now I hope you get that. Idolatry is the most serious and contaminating sin there is. And the reason is because it strikes directly at the character of God.

And once you have adulterated the character of God, you have lost the guidelines for any other moral judgment. And so Pandora's box is open and everything is going to be chaos unless there is the right perspective of God. I think there's no question but that idolatry is the most serious and contaminating of all the sins because it strikes directly at the character of God. That's why out of the Ten Commandments the first three of them are directly related to idolatry. Because that's the beginning of everything. If you don't have the true perspective on God, then everything is lost.

Now we need a close look at idolatry because if it's that important, if it's the worse sin of all and if the Bible has so much to say about it, and believe me, I couldn't even begin to go through all the Scriptures that talk about idolatry...if that's true, then we really ought to understand what this thing is. And that's what I want to share with you this morning. And once we understand it all, then we'll develop it as Paul does, next week.

Now listen, I'm going to give you several major points and a whole lot of sub points, don't worry about numbers and letters and things, just get the point and we'll be all right. And you can write on the backside of your outline if you want, cause I'm not even going to get to the front side.

First of all, and I'm just going to give you a broad definition and then a particularized look at idolatry, first of all idolatry is libel on the character of God...l-i-b-e-l, it is libel, it is slander on the character of God. Idolatry slanders God's character. And that, beloved, is the most fearful sin. You are striking at the heart of Satan. You are striking at the heart of the system. You are striking at the heart of sin when you libel God. The idolatrous heart, and here's the point, assumes that God is other than He is. And that is a terrible sin. Tozer says, and well says, "A God begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God," end quote. You see, idolatry is not just wearing a loin cloth and bowing down to a rock. Idolatry is not just kneeling before an image. Civilized people in our society don't do that very much. But idolatry, and this is important, is assuming God to be something He is not. It is to have either unworthy or erroneous views of God. That's idolatry. Perversions about who God is...is idolatry.

In Romans chapter 1 we have basically the pattern of this. "When they knew God," Romans 1:21 says, "they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful but became vain, or proud in their imagination and their foolish heart was darkened, professing themselves to be wise they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man." Man has always wanted to make God in his own image. Man always wants to drag God down, to force God to be like he is.

And I see this so many times. We want to turn God into what we are. Any unworthy thought about God is idolatry. And one of the things that we do, I think, most frequently is this particular idolatrous act of reducing God to us. I can give you just a simple illustration of it. Have you noticed that the most popular name for the Son of God for the second person of the trinity is Jesus. All you ever hear is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, particular in the Pentecostal movement, you hear them...this is practically the only term they use...Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. And what they have done so very much in the minds and the hearts of the people is they have made Jesus into sort of a buddy-buddy, sort of a pal, very humanistic. The name of the second person of the trinity is the Lord Jesus Christ. And I think it's important that we...it's not that using the term Jesus is wrong, but it's important that we don't in our effort to make Jesus into a sort of a palsy-walsy type of a person, drag Him down to humanize Him. It may be that we have reduced Jesus to the point where we no longer conceive of Him as He ought to be conceived of and that is idolatry.

I'll give you another illustration of it. Whenever you in your own life fail to trust God, that's idolatry. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, John said, "He that believes not makes God a...what?...a liar." Let's say as a Christian you have a problem and instead of praying about it and trusting God for it, you panic over it, start doubting God in your mind. You know what you've done? You've just doubted God, right? You've said in your mind, "God, I'm not sure You can do what You claim," and that is blasphemy, right? That's idolatry cause you've made God less than He is, you've thought unworthily about God, erroneously about God. Anything that you do that is less than true about the character and person and work of God in the manifestation of the trinity is idolatry. A wrong view of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, a wrong view of the essence of the doctrine of Christ, a wrong view of the doctrine of the Father is tantamount to idolatry for it is making God into something other than He is. Very vital.

And that's why I say that even as Christians, we can be idolatrous in having either inadequate theology where we don't know enough about God, we sort of go along ignorantly thinking God is something that He's not, or where we have decided to make God into something that He is not. This is a very dangerous thing. And I think it's something that we need to be aware of that it isn't just the people over in Bala-bala land who are kneeling down out in the boondocks worshiping a rock, it's everybody and anybody who has thoughts of God that are less than true and unworthy of His character. That's idolatry. It constitutes slander. It constitutes libel. And consequently we have made a God who isn't God and that's idolatry. God doesn't want to have to compete with somebody else that isn't Him but has His name.

All right, a second thought...idolatry is also worshiping the true God in the wrong way. Idolatry is worshiping the true God in the wrong way. To give you an illustration of this, we need to only remind you of our study...before we went into our series on John 13 to 16, when we were earlier in the tenth chapter of 1 Corinthians and discussed Israel, we discussed the fact of making the golden calf, remember?, in Exodus 32. And we said that in the first six verses of Exodus 32, when they made the golden calf, it was a calf that was made, believe it or not, to be a representation of the true God. They were representing the God who brought them out of Egypt. They were worshiping the right God but in the wrong way, you see.

There's a lot of that going on. Believe me, there's a lot of it. There are people today who are worshiping the true God in the wrong way. One way to do that is to worship the God of truth with emotion void of truth. You know what I mean by that? To worship the God of truth, you must worship Him in spirit and in truth. But there are many people who just let their emotions go bananas and they call it worship and it has no orientation toward truth. To worship the true God in the wrong way would be to create around the worship of God so much spiritual mocus and faldral and hocus-pocus and stand up, sit down, and light this, and bend over and do this, that you've lost the reality of it. And instead of worshiping the God, you have substituted the form and you have a mindless kind of worship. There are all different ways to worship the true God in the wrong way. And they did it there by making a molten image to represent the true God. It says, Aaron said to them, "Now that the thing is made, let us declare a feast unto Jehovah," he says.

In Psalm 106:19, yes, they made a calf in Horeb and worshiped the melted image. Now listen to this verse, "Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eats grass." Now who is the glory of Israel? Who is it? Who is their glory? Well, it's God, Jehovah God. They changed God into an ox. Now God is not an ox. And you...if you want to change Jesus into a man, Jesus is not a man. If you want to think thoughts less than true of God, less than worthy of God in any of the

manifestations of His trinity, you have missed the point and you have constituted idolatry. And throughout Israel's history there was this strange intermingling of idolatry with the worship of God.

And I see it so much today in the kind of worship of God that is mindless, that has no truth to it. Where they're just supposedly worshiping God with sensual desire. It's sensual worship. What Paul Sailhamer was teaching us on Wednesday night, when you do not worship God out of truth because you have no truth, then you tend only to worship God out of your senses and you have a sensual worship. And that translates easily into the kind of pagan worship we know in the history of the world, right? Invariably the false religious systems of ancient days were wed to sexual sin, weren't they? Because it was sensual worship. It was pure experience without basis or foundation. So you have that.

On the other hand, you can have that cold dead formal creed kind of thing that really constituted Judaism in the time of Christ, it was nothing other than idolatry as well because they were worshiping the form rather than the God who was behind the form.

All right, so I've given you two thoughts to begin with. Idolatry is libel on the character of God. Secondly, idolatry is worshiping God in the wrong way. Thirdly, now I'll give you some specifics on idolatry, to help you to define it. Idolatry is worshiping any image. It is worship of any image. And there are so many Scriptures, that we wouldn't even attempt to cover them all to define this, but I'll give you one. Isaiah 44:17 will just help you to understand what we mean by this. And he's discussing here idolatry and the stupidity of idolatry and he's got a whole section on it here. They make a carved image, verse 9, and all of this. And they form a God, verse 10. And he goes on and on. He describes how they do it and how they build it, how they put it in the fire and so forth.

Verse 15, he makes a carved image. He falls down to it. He burns part of it in the fire with part of it he eats flesh. He roasts a roast and is satisfied. He warms himself, and so forth and so on. Verse 17, "And the residue of it he makes a God, even His carved image. He falls down unto it and worships it and prays to it and says, Deliver me, for You are my God." Now there's a perfect definition of an idol. The guy makes it in a fire. He sticks it on the ground. He bows down. He worships. He makes sacrifices. He says you are my God, do this, do this. That's idolatry...to worship any kind of image. We are not to worship an image of any kind. Don't ever substitute an image for the reality.

One of the things that brought about the historic iconoclastic controversy in the Middle Ages in the years of the church was the fact that one part of the church, namely the western church which we know today as Roman Catholicism, wanted idols everywhere. The eastern church, today known as the Greek Orthodox or the Russian Orthodox Church, wanted to smash the idols and it was the whole controversy based on the idea of whether we would have images or not. The Bible is clear that we are not to bow down to images. I've heard people tell me many times that they have a picture of Jesus Christ over a little place where they always pray. And while they're praying, they always kneel before the picture of Christ. Now idolatry isn't necessarily kneeling before the picture of Christ as long as you have the proper perspective. I think it's ridiculous to do that and it sure puts you in a position to confuse the issue. But it isn't necessarily idolatry if what's in your mind is the right thing. But still, we are not to worship images of any kind. To assume that there is some power behind some image is wrong.

Now let me give you another idea...number four, I'm just listing these thoughts...idolatry is worshiping angels. Don't ever worship angels. Fortunately we don't know enough of them so we could get too

involved in it. We only know the names of three and one of them is Satan and the other two are Gabriel and Michael. And we have a good illustration in the book of Revelation where John tried to worship an angel and what did the angel tell him to do? Told him to get up and cut it out. He says, "I'm only a creature like you, what are you doing down there, John, worship God." So you have Revelation clear on that.

And also in Colossians 2:18, it says, "Watch out for this false doctrine about worshipping angels," Colossians 2:18. There's no place for the veneration in the worship of angels. That's idolatry.

Fifthly, idolatry is worshipping devils. In Revelation 9:20 it says that they were in the picture of the Tribulation, worshipping demons. And then it goes on to talk about idols of stone and silver and wood and all that. So idolatry is libel against the character of God and that means to think anything unworthy of God or erroneous about His person, worshipping the true God in a false way, worshipping any idol, any image. Idolatry is worshipping angels. Idolatry is worshipping demons.

And that goes on today, doesn't it? People who believe in the Satan church and bow down to demons and bow down to false deities and spirit beings, mediums and all that we have, trappings that go with it.

Sixth thought in defining idolatry, and I don't know if you ever thought about this, but idolatry is worshipping dead men..dead men, any dead men. Venerating or worshipping dead men is idolatry. And I'll show you an interesting verse that you may not have discovered on this. Psalm 106:28, I'll just read it to you, don't turn to it, it's just short...and here he's describing again the typical pattern of Israel being so unfaithful to the covenant of God and falling into idolatry. And he says this, "They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor," this is a form of Baal worship, now listen, "and ate the sacrifices of the dead."

Part of the worship of Baal apparently involved the worship of the dead. And Israel had gotten into worshipping dead men. That is sin. That is idolatry. We are not to worship dead men, any dead men of any kind. Doesn't matter whether they've been canonized or not. Do we worship Paul? Do we worship Peter? I'll never forget when I...had been at St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, they have that statue called "The Black Peter," people go buy and they kiss him on the toe and they've kissed away his toe. And, you know, this worship of Peter. And I...if there's one person in heaven whose really upset about that, it's Peter. He doesn't want that. But that is...that's the kind of thing that we're talking about, the worship of a dead man--I don't care if he's the Apostle Paul--is idolatry. Worship God and Him only shalt thou worship, the Bible says. Not just that He is the supreme one to be worshiped, He is the only one to be worshiped. It doesn't matter who that dead man is.

And, you know, in the worship of Baal, there...part of the worship of Baal was in the gardens and the groves that they went to, they worshiped the graves and they worshiped the monuments that represented the dead people. That's idolatry.

Now let me get it much more down to our society and to what we think in terms of our own attitudes. Idolatry is any...hang on to this one...any idol in your heart. Idolatry is any idol in your heart. And you know you have to look at your own heart to tell what it is. But I daresay, if I said, "All right everybody, take out your pencils and do this...write down the idols that you struggle with in your life..." there isn't a person in here, a thinking person who couldn't write something down. If you have a problem with it,

ask your wife...she'll have no problem with it. She knows where you worship. She knows what you bow down to. So do your kids. So do you.

It can be a lot of things. Education...there are some people who bow down to education. All they want are degrees. They don't want just a name, they want a name with a whole bunch of extraneous letters strung on the end of it. Some people bow down to science. Chad Walsh has written a book called Campus Gods on File and he talks about the fact that on the campuses of America, the students have gods. And summing it all up, basically the gods of modern man are humanism, materialism, and sex. Humanism, you know, Billy Graham says we have "In God we trust" on our coins and "Me first" engraved on our hearts. That's humanism. That's humanism. It's "Mother, I'd rather do it myself," that's humanism. "I can handle my own problems...I can solve my own mysteries...I'll run my own world," you know.

When Billy Graham was at UCLA he says, "That's so ridiculous, man can't solve his own problems." He said somewhere...take the population explosion.. "Somewhere in the world there's a woman having a baby every fourth of a second." Now I think we ought to find her and stop her. But...but the point is, the point is that man wants to believe that he can handle himself but he can't. But that's humanism.

And in materialism, another of the gods of humanity, materialism...and then the god sex that is probably the ugliest god, it's no different. We were in Balbek some time ago and seeing the god Bacchus to whom the great temple of the orgies was built, incredible edifice, worshipping sex. This has always been one of the gods of men. So, an idol in the heart.

Now Ezekiel 14 zeroes in on this, "Son of Man," Ezekiel 14:3, "these men," and he's talking here about the elders of Israel in verse 1, "the elders of Israel have set up their idols in their heart." They haven't made any stone images and they haven't made any gold and silver gods, but they have idols in their heart and they put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. I mean, they've got this thing between me and them. All they can see is this idol. This is what they're bowing down to. They can't give Me priority, they're too busy getting an education, in our day. They're too busy making money. They're too busy being somebody. They're too busy with their activities. They're too busy worshipping the god of recreation, or sport or whatever it is and they've got that between them and me. In verse 4 he says, "Thus saith the Lord God, every man of the house of Israel that sets up his idols in his heart and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face and comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him." I will answer him. "I'll take the house of Israel in their heart because they are estranged from Me through their idols." I'll take over, He says. I'll seize them. Idolatry is any idol in the heart.

Now, I can be specific about a couple of these. If you'll look with me at Ephesians 5:5 I'll show you a couple of idols in the heart. Ephesians 5:5, and Paul here suggests this almost as an aside, but helps us to get an idea that is very, very important, he's talking about the fact that as children, dear children of God, we ought to walk in love and walking in love means we avoid false love but we maintain true love. False love is fornication and all of the stuff that goes with that. And then he goes on into other things that we should avoid. In verse 5 he says, "For this you know that no fornicator, sexual sin, nor unclean person nor covetous man (parenthesis--who is an idolater) has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God." Now here's another thing that is idolatry. This is the eighth in the list...idolatry is covetous, or covetous is idolatry.

Somebody who covets really is worshiping in the materialism end, isn't it? This is money, things, possessions, it could be a house, a car, clothes, more money, more bonds, more stocks, bigger business, more products, more inventory, more, more whatever. Covetous is idolatry because whenever you begin...covetous is...you know what it is? Give you a definition of covetous, wanting what you don't...what?...have. That's covetous. You say, "Oh...are you kidding me?" I'm not kidding you. Covetous is wanting what you don't have. Do you ever do that? I do it. I have to say that because you know that anyway. Of course...covetous...wanting what you don't have. Now you can be tempted to want what you don't have and reject the temptation, that's covetous to get to the place where you have a strong driving desire for the thing you don't have. And Paul says, "I have learned in whatever state I am there with to be content." I know what it is to have, I know what it is to have not, either way. God help us to get to that level of maturity. Covetous...worshiping money, worshiping possessions. And just to make sure you didn't forget that, a little later in the New Testament it's echoed in Colossians 3:5. Same statement. Covetous which is idolatry. You cannot worship God, the true God in the true way, Jesus said, and also worship money. God and mammon.

But I'll tell you, money gets in the way of worshiping God. Read 1 Timothy 6. "They that would be rich fall into many snares, deceitful lusts and hurts and temptations." And that's the thing that gets in the front of you like the Israel elders of old. You get money between your face and God and you can't see Him anymore. Or maybe your God is possessions or a better job or a better salary or a bigger house or whatever or whatever, and that becomes the preoccupation of your mind, that stands between you and God and blocks His view.

There's another thing, and I don't want to spend too much time cause the Holy Spirit's going to deal with you on this as He is with me, but number nine in just giving you a long list of things to define idolatry is idolatry is also lust. Idolatry is lust. I think this is a very helpful verse. Philippians 3:19, now I don't want anybody to panic but here it comes, "Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly." Oh my...and it goes on to define..."Whose glory is their shame who mind earthly things." Now whose god is their belly could better be translated appetite and most of us would feel a little better about that. That's a little more abstract. But even better than that I would say, whose god is lust. But, if we want to be honest, lust is a broad term and it doesn't...it can involve the belly. There are people who live for the one thing that they have in mind centrally and that's to eat. Do you know there are people who haven't finished the meal they're eating until they're already thinking about where they're going to get the next one and what it's going to be. Do you know any of those people? You know, we live in society that crowds us this way. Have you ever driven down Reseda Boulevard, north of Roscoe? Every time I go down there all I can think of is this decadent society. Look at all of the places where you can let your god be your belly. They're all over the place. Or you go down to...what Hollywood, or down in that area down there, restaurant after restaurant after restaurant, people just going from one to the next as fast as they can go to get the new tastes.

We get to the place where all of a sudden we've lost our perspective. It's true, people can live to eat. But that isn't just...that isn't all that he has in mind here and unfortunately the King James says "belly" and it's really broader than that. It can be a lust for anything. Some people just run around to pander sex. Oh, they just go from one sex object to the next, you know. It's a magazine and when the magazine's done, it's a television program, when the television program's done it's whatever whatever whatever. And that's in their minds all the time. It can be lust for any direction, toward any object, strong desire sets up gods. Lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, pride of life.

Well, I've given you nine things that will give you a fairly comprehensive look at idolatry. Wrong

thoughts about God; images other than God, wrong ways of worshiping the right God; worshiping angels, devils, dead men; setting up idols in the heart such as covetousness and lust...now that's idolatry, beloved. And what does the Bible say that we're to do about idolatry? What does it say in 1 Corinthians 10:14? Do what? Flee. Paul says to the Corinthians, you can't realize what danger you're in if you let your liberty run you right out to the end of it. "Well, I'm not going to get involved in this certain lust, and I'm not going to get involved in covetousness, I have my liberties, I can indulge in a few of those things." But if you keep exposing yourself to that stuff, the chances are you are. Turn and run.

Now I want to help you a little bit further to know why you ought to run by telling you what effect idolatry has on you and on me. How does idolatry effect us? Number one, it defiles us. And what that means is it renders us sinful. It brings sin upon us rather than righteousness. In Ezekiel 20 verse 7 it says, "Defile not yourselves with idols." Idols have defiling effect. I don't care whether it's the gods of Egypt that you're bowing down to Ra, you know the sun god, or you're bowing down to the beetle god of Egypt in the time in which this was indicating, or whether today it's the god of golf in your heart or whatever, or money, whatever that idol is, that has a defiling effect. That is, it interrupts righteousness. And I'm talking to an unbeliever or a believer. It will have the same effect on either. Fortunately and graciously, God forgives and keeps on cleansing the believer but it is no less idolatrous and no less defiling.

Secondly, idolatry has not only a defiling effect on the person who is involved but it has a polluting effect on everybody around them. A person who worships an idol tends to tear down everybody around him. You see this in Israel. A little group of people began worshiping Baal and pretty soon it had national consequences and Ezekiel chapter 36 verse 18 helps us to see that in these terms, it says, "Where I poured My fury on them for the blood that they had shed on the land and for their idols by which they had polluted it." Idolatry not only has a devastating effect on me, whatever that idol might be, but it has a polluting effect on everybody that I touch.

Another thing about idols, they can't help you anyway. You ought to keep that in mind. You don't have one idol in your life that's going to be any use to you. You certainly can't turn to your money when you get into real problems. You can't turn to your education. You can't turn to whatever particular point of fame you might have. You can't turn to your big house or your bank account or whatever. In Isaiah, I think it's 46:7, you have that indicated. It says, it discusses idolatry, it's really funny to see the way he discusses it here, he says these guys are making idols and they do all this and they carry their idols on their shoulder. Here they come with their new idol. They just forged their new idol, they come down the road with their new idol. And they stick it in its place. And it stands there, Isaiah says. There it is. "And from its place it shall not move." It will never go anywhere. That's the end, it's there and that's it. "Yea, one shall cry unto it, yet can it not answer nor save him out of his trouble." Idols can't help you. Can't do a thing for you.

And I'll tell you something further that he talks about in Ezekiel 44, idols not only defile you, pollute everything around you, can't help you when you need it anyway, but idols bring upon you guilt that activates God's vengeance. Ezekiel 44:10, and this is straight, "The Levites who are gone away far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray away from Me after their idols, they shall even bear their iniquity." Idolatry has culpability, that is it has guilt connected with it. When you have a false god, you render yourself guilty. And that, you see, brings down God's vengeance. You put yourself in a position for chastening for God to judge.

Just to show you how He does that, in Isaiah 65:2, these are interesting terms, listen to this, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people that walked in a way that was not good after their own thoughts," you see, they conjured up their own ideas of God and their own ideas of how to worship, "a people provoking Me to anger continually to My face, they sacrifice in gardens and they burn incense on altars of brick, they remain among the graves and they lodge in the monuments." You see, there's that idea of worshiping dead people, "That eats swine flesh and broth of abominable things in their vessels that say, Stand by thy self, come not near to me, stay away, don't come near me, for I am holier than thou." You've always wondered where that came from, haven't you? It's Isaiah 65:5. And I like God's reaction, he says, "They are smoke in My nose." Did you ever get smoke in your nose? That is irritating. God says they irritate Me. "Behold it is written, I will not keep silence, will recompense, even recompense into their bosom." I'm going to bounce it right back like a backboard right at them. "Your iniquities, the iniquities of your fathers together, says the Lord, who have burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed Me on the hills," and they had their idols up on the mountains, "therefore will I measure their former work into their bosom," I'll bounce it right back at them, right into them.

Now this, people, tells you what happens from idolatrous situations. You activate the recompensing vengeance of God. A man who lives worshiping any other than the true God, or worshiping the true God in any other way than the true way through His Son is in a position where God's vengeance is activated against him.

While I'm in Isaiah, I'll show you an interesting verse in 57:5, this is just a fascinating look at idolatry. You can't believe how sorted this is. It talks about sorceress, adulterers and harlots and all the gross things, but it just doesn't get any more vile than verse 5, and this is another aspect of it. Idols defile, they pollute, they give no help, they bring guilt and they demand vengeance from God. And one other thing that idols do is inflame the heart. They set men on fire, spiritually speaking. They begin to consume them. They get out of control. Verse 5, "In flaming yourselves with idols under every green tree." You've lit yourselves on fire with this thing. And when we say a man has a fire in his heart, we mean he's got a tremendous uncontrollable passion. And, you know, there is even an exact physical act that brought this statement to bear? They used to at the Spring Festival, the Palestinian heathens at the Spring Festivals, they took huge trees and they hanged on the trees their sacrifices and then burned up the whole tree. So that was like a metaphor for the burning of their hearts.

And then the second part of the verse, I'll just give you a footnote, "Slaying the children in the valleys under the clefts of the rocks." The Canaanites killed their children. Part of their sacrifices to the god Molech was to take their children, for example, when they built a building, put a live child in a jar, seal the jar and build it into the wall. Further than that, what he's referring to here is they used to take little children at the festivals to Molech and they would stick them in a leather bag and they would tie knots at the top of the bag and throw the children off a cliff. That's precisely what this means, slaying children in the valleys under the clefts of the rocks. That's idolatry. That's how far it went and Israel was involved in it.

Now that's idolatry...lighting the flames of their own burning. In fact, Jeremiah 50:38, Jeremiah says, "Idols have driven you mad." They lost their senses. And idolatry, a life time of worshiping the wrong things, the wrong gods in the wrong way can drive a man to the place where he cannot any longer think sanely.

Now that helps you to see idolatry, doesn't it? What's God's attitude? Deuteronomy 7:25, it says,

"Idolatry is an abomination to Me." God hates it. Deuteronomy 16:22, Deuteronomy chapter 17, God says, "I hate idolatry." Jeremiah 8, God pours out His wrath against idolatry. He says the people who do that are going to be manure, they're going to be dung on the earth. In Revelation 14, Revelation 21, Revelation 22, God says there's no idolater ever going to enter into My Kingdom. So, beloved, there's only one way to react to idolatry. That's one, what is it? Run from it, any kind, leave it.

I'm going to close with this, Joshua 23:7, it says this, "That you come not among these nations, these that remain among you, don't intermingle, he says, please don't intermingle." This is Joshua's final message just before he dies. "Don't make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them nor bow yourselves unto them, but cling to the Lord your God." You see, Joshua's words are just like Paul's. Have nothing to do with them. Don't even talk about them. Cling to God. Beloved, we have liberty but our liberty is not to see how far we can go till we get to the end of our liberty right on the edge of the world's idolatry and get into temptation and fall in. Our liberty is to let us run away from these things. Keep running from idolatry. And Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 gives you three reasons. Number one, it's inconsistent. Number two, it's demonic. And number three, it's offensive to the Lord. And those are the three things we're going to discuss next week, same time, same station. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, for speaking to us this morning. Thank You for what we've learned. Thank You for how we've been sort of separated, at least in thought, from everything and drawn to You alone. May we worship You in the true way in Christ's name, who is the way. Amen.

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